

ODE TO AN AFRICAN TITAN

MELES ZENAWI

By Genenew Assefa

A thick dark cloud of sorrow eclipsed the rising sun over the skies of Ethiopia no sooner



than its first citizen, Meles Zenawi, passed away, sending a shockwave of anguish up and down the country. The shining star that lit Ethiopia's bright future is no more. The voice of Africa whose words beckoned many to a new beginning has been silenced by some cruel fate that will 'forever live in infamy.'

The flood of tears that greeted his untimely death speak volumes as no words can fully express the loss felt by countless many who followed his lead in the war against poverty. Much can be said about what Meles means to the people of Ethiopia. Not least is that he deeply touched their lives as he endlessly labored to lift the burden that weighed on them so heavily. But none can adequately capture the hope he sparked among the poor of this nation who had resigned to their fate without even a vocabulary for prosperity. Raising hope in a better future in a land of despair is only part of the larger story why millions grieve the tragic departure of the only man that they had ever hailed as their own true leader. Without doubt, Meles' enduring legacy which this nation of nationalities will cherish indefinitely lies in the solid path of progress that he and his comrades have charted. A path born out of a firm conviction that Ethiopia deserves a better deal than the misery it had been fated to endure.

Nations honor their great men and women in a variety ways. For the Ethiopian people, none it seems could be a more fitting tribute than the honor they are showering on their fallen hero, Meles Zenawi. Despite their heart-felt grief, they feel nothing less could be an apt expression of the debt owed to Meles. Except to pledge allegiance to the banner he foisted to rally the poor in the final bout against the wicked enemy, drought and famine. What better homage can a people pay to a late prime minister than to vow to see through what his government has begun under his firm guidance and wise counsel? Though ill-

health has denied him the pleasure of even a brief sight of the final outcome of his life's endeavor, Meles' sacrifice will not be in vain. Indeed his one fixed message and fervent wish --- stamping out poverty--- has been heard across the eighty million people of Ethiopia that he so admirably served.

No wonder Ethiopia mourns Meles Zenawi whose stature compares to any towering world figure. A rare personality, as it were, that once perhaps in several decades in the life of a nation suddenly appears to inspire its people to accomplish a great feat. Unfortunate, therefore, is an understatement that does little justice to what it means to be robbed of Meles' wisdom and insight. Yet, all is not lost. There is, after all, a big consolation in that Meles is survived by a party that bear his imprints as he does of the party without which his greatness might not have shined brilliantly.

Thus, the Ethiopian people are summoning their courage to bid their outstanding leader a final farewell. No doubt their last rite will be drowned in bitter tears. The saving grace, nonetheless, is that they will pay their last respect to their leader with one reassuring thought and expectation. Namely, that Meles' heirs will strive to approximate the high standards he alone could have set as chief executive of this emerging African Tiger. Alas, the new generation of leaders is expected to live up to the ideals and traditions of the party of Meles Zenawi. Much as the party's retiring veterans have with steadfast firmness in the face of adversity. Finally, there is a bittersweet irony in the whole saga of Meles' spectacular life of service to country. For, the more his government gains ground against poverty as it must, the more Meles will be missed by those whose lives has began to change for the better: Thanks, in no small part, to the foundation which he (Meles) laid and the services he generously gave to this country throughout his brief, but unforgettable life.

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